



## City of Seattle

Mayor Jenny A. Durkan

January 24, 2019

Dear Councilmembers:

Thank you for your letter and for your individual commitments to ensure Seattle is centered on equity, justice, and compassion in all our work. Like you, I have focused on addressing our affordability and homelessness crisis and increasing equity in our City. I've spent countless hours in the community hearing from service providers, our seniors, young people, and people with lived experience with homelessness, to better understand their needs. I've also met with the staff at HSD who are on the front lines of serving people experiencing homelessness, survivors of gender-based violence, children, and seniors.

When Catherine Lester left the role to care for her family last May, Jason Johnson stepped in as the Interim Director with her full support. Catherine had also previously served as Interim before being appointed to the permanent position. However, because of the critical role HSD plays in equity, I wanted to see how Jason did in the job and ensure his work aligned with what I had heard were priorities in the dozens of community and stakeholder meetings and events. In addition, Jason met with many providers, stakeholders, and community partners. Through all of this, I received extremely positive feedback from organizations, community members, and providers.

Jason, a social worker, had most recently served as Deputy Director of HSD before becoming Interim Director. He is a collaborative and experienced leader who has overseen the HSD team as they have served Seattle's children, seniors, people with disabilities, and families through the City's many programs. His dedication to the department and his support from leaders across our community made it clear he was the right choice to lead the Human Services Department. I was also proud to appoint an LGBTQ leader who understands and has focused on LGBTQ youth and seniors as well as the disproportionate impacts of homelessness on LGBTQ individuals.

As you noted, the Director of HSD plays a critical role in implementing and operationalizing the City of Seattle's homelessness prevention and emergency response strategies that are essential to the survival of thousands of people experiencing housing instability. As both Interim Director and Deputy Director, Jason has overseen this work. Because of his work in the community, his nomination has already received support from many community organizations including African Community Housing & Development, Aging & Disability Services Advisory Council, Chief Seattle Club, Accelerator YMCA, and Plymouth Housing Group.

Over the past 10 months, I have worked closely with Jason on how we best support and standup new services for our neighbors experiencing homelessness. Jason oversaw the largest shelter expansion in the City's history which included expansion of services to more LGBTQ households. Working together, we have made our homelessness response more effective to serve those communities disproportionately impacted by our crisis and have deployed more evidence-based strategies and interventions. This has resulted in twice the number of exits to permanent housing for Native

populations, and an increase in housing exits for Black/African American populations. During his time as the Interim Director, he has engaged with community, stakeholders, and has worked with our regional partners, including philanthropy. As regional governance has become the key issue in combating the homelessness crisis, Jason has been a central figure in those discussions, while successfully leading on all HSD initiatives. Maintaining those partnerships and continuity is key to stewarding the successful implementation of this new era of homelessness response.

Choosing department heads is one of my most important obligations as Mayor, and I wanted to take a thoughtful and deliberative approach to every appointment. It was important to me to ensure we have the most qualified, diverse cabinet. In fact, we have created more inclusive search processes than any Mayor in recent history. The appointment or search varies by department, except the Police Chief Search which is defined by the City Charter. Previous mayors have routinely appointed leaders without any search process, community input, discussions with mayors from across the country, visits to departments or allowing an Interim Director to serve for a period of time.

While I've elected to do some national search processes with robust search committees, I also have appointed and you have confirmed uniquely qualified individuals after stakeholder meetings, outreach and discussions with employees. You have appointed and you have unanimously confirmed a series of candidates this past year without raising any objections to process, including: Andres Mantilla, Director of the Department of Neighborhoods; Ben Noble, City Budget Office Director; Lily Wilson-Codega, Director of the Office of Intergovernmental Relations; Marty Garfinkel, the Director Office of Labor Standards; and Calvin Goings, Director of the Department of Finance and Administrative Services.

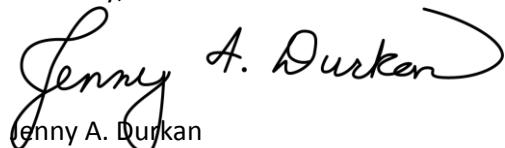
Jason had perhaps the most scrutiny over the last 10 months. While I determined next steps on the selection of the permanent director during the regional governance discussion, he had to do the job, lead some of the City's largest initiatives, and routinely update Council on the City's progress.

While you and other Councilmembers have quickly worked to schedule confirmations of potential cabinet members addressing our City's most pressing issues, it is unfortunate that no hearings have been set with Jason for this critical role. In fact, the Chair of the Committee has only had two meetings since August, including one meeting in September and one meeting last week. I also understand the Chair of the Committee has declined multiple times to meet with Jason until last week.

Under my administration and previous administrations, the Council has moved forward regarding well qualified candidates appointed by the Mayor, and I would only expect a robust discussion and public comment regarding of any candidates' qualifications and experience. Jason is no exception.

As a key member of my cabinet, Jason's five years of experience in HSD, his previous experience in the provider community and his dedication the City make him well suited and qualified to serve in this role. I hope that you and the Council move to confirm him quickly. I am happy to discuss any questions in our regular monthly meetings.

Sincerely,



Jenny A. Durkan  
Mayor of Seattle